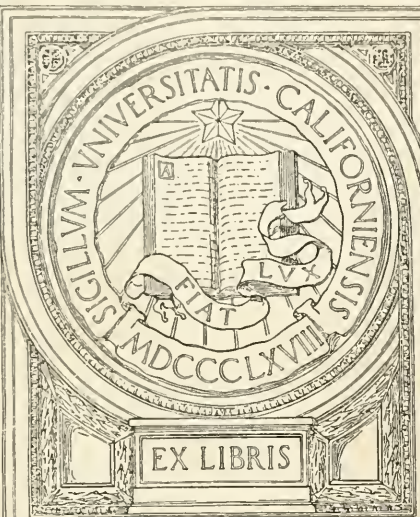


The Story Of A Friendship

By
Josephine Mildred Blanc

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ROBERT ERNEST COWAN

The Story of a Friends



A California Reminiscence of Robert Louis Stevenson

His few months in Monterey and his old friend

JULES SIMONEAU

BY
JOSEPHINE MILDRED BLANCH

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SAN CARLOS 1769

ROBERT ERNEST GOWAN

“Doomed to know not Winter, only Spring.
A being trod the flowery April for awhile,
Took his fill of music, joy of thought and seeing,
Came and stayed and went,
Nor ever ceased to smile.”



ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

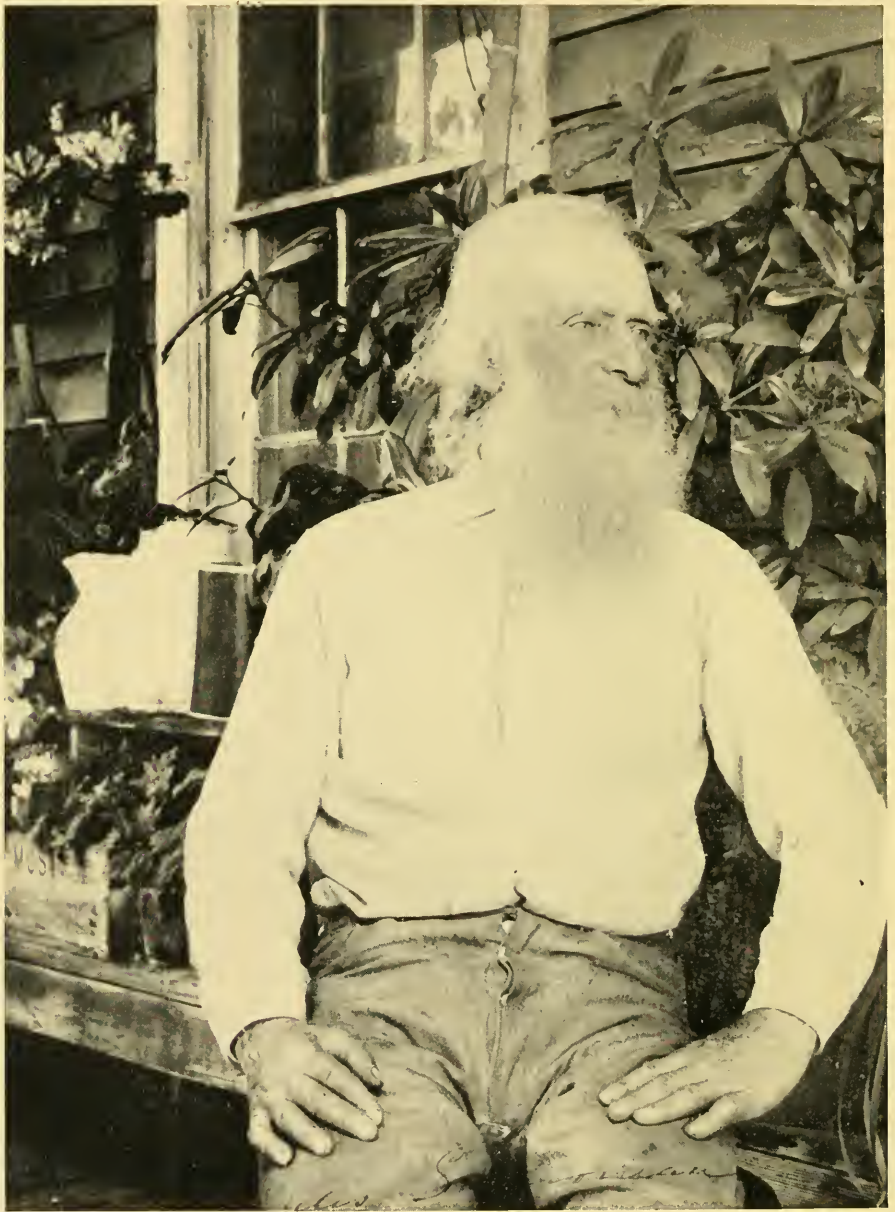
The Story of a Friendship

Robert Louis Stevenson
Jules Simoneau

A California Reminiscence
of Stevenson

BY
JOSEPHINE MILDRED BLANCH

This story was written a year previous to the death of Simoneau, which occurred in 1908
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JULES SIMONEAU, TELLING OF STEVENSON

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The Story of a Friendship

“So long as we love we serve; so long as we are loved by others I would almost say we are indispensable, and no man is useless while he has a friend.”

—*Robert Louis Stevenson*

I never leave a certain modest dwelling hidden behind the brow of one of the surrounding hills of the old town of Monterey without thinking deeply on the subject of friendship. I have sought the house often, as has many another visitor to the town, and though its unpretending exterior tells nothing of the generous and princely heart of the gentle old man who lives within, and although Monterey is filled with crumbling adobes of historic interest to the tourist, yet this vine-grown cottage is more often sought than any of the decaying landmarks which might tell some story of the eventful past of this early Spanish town.

It is to the home of Jules Simoneau that I go, an humble shrine, where the lovers of Robert Louis Stevenson, in search of some reminiscence of the gifted writer, may hear from the lips of this dear old friend something of his few months in Monterey, one of the most pathetic pages in the life-history of Stevenson,—those most eventful months which followed his departure from Scotland.

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All readers of Stevenson's life may recall this period which marked the turning-point in the author's life, when, as he writes, "feeling that he had now grown to his full stature of manhood when every man should cease to be a burden to his father, and having learned his craft, every circumstance seemed to point out that the time was now come for him to seek his own livelihood and justify his independence."

That realization was awakened in Stevenson by his parents' opposition, because of his youth, to his romantic attachment to the woman whom he so deeply loved, and who a few months previous to this had returned to America and was ill in California. On Stevenson's return to Edinburgh, hearing of her illness, he immediately decided to waive all objections of parents and friends, and leaving both in almost total ignorance of the hopes and motives which prompted so sudden a departure, sailed for America. So it was for her whom he loved, and of whom he writes,—

"Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble dew,
Steel true and blade straight
The great Artificer made my mate"

that he gave up Scotland, friends and kindred, and, enduring untold hardships on his journey over sea and continent, reached the far West almost penniless and fainting with weariness. So much had the long journey affected Stevenson that when he

reached San Francisco he looked, it is said, "like a man at death's door." But the news which greeted him was most gratifying.

Stevenson spent only a few days in San Francisco, whence, to recover from the ill effects of the journey, he continued his way southward and camped out for a while in the mountains beyond Monterey. Here he remained several weeks quite ill. For two nights and a day he lay out under a tree in a kind of stupor, and there two frontiersmen in charge of a goat ranch found him and nursed him back to life. From this place he writes, "I am now lying in an upper chamber with the clinking of goat bells in my ears, which proves to me that the goats have come home and it will soon be time to eat." After his illness he found his way down to Monterey. Very unlike the thriving little town of the present, intermingling its ruins with modern residences, was the Spanish town of that day as Stevenson found it, with "two or three streets economically paved with sea sand."

Here he fell ill again, but found quarters curiously to his taste, as he tells you, for they were "simple though discriminating." He lodged with his doctor and took his meals at a restaurant, and this is the introduction which he gives us to the little French restaurant kept by the kind "Père Simoneau," who cared for him through all these months. He describes it thus:

"Of all my private collection of remembered inns and restaurants, and I believe it, other things being equal, to be unrivalled,



OLD ADOBE KNOWN AS THE STEVENSON HOUSE
HOME OF STEVENSON WHILE IN MONTEREY

one particular house of entertainment stands forth alone. I am grateful indeed to many a swinging sign board, to many a rusty wine bush, but not with the same kind of gratitude. Some were beautifully situated, some had an admirable table, some were gathering places of excellent companies, but take them all for all, not one can be compared with Simoneau's at Monterey. To the front it was a barber shop, part bar. To the back there was a kitchen and a *salle à manger*. The intending diner found himself in a chill bare adobe room furnished with chairs and tables and adorned with some oil sketches roughly brushed upon the wall in the manner of Barbizon and Cernay. The table at whatever hour you entered was already laid with a not spotless napkin and, by way of *epergne*, with a dish of green peppers and tomatoes, pleasing to both eye and palate. If you stayed there to meditate before a meal you would hear Simoneau all about the kitchen and rattling among the dishes."

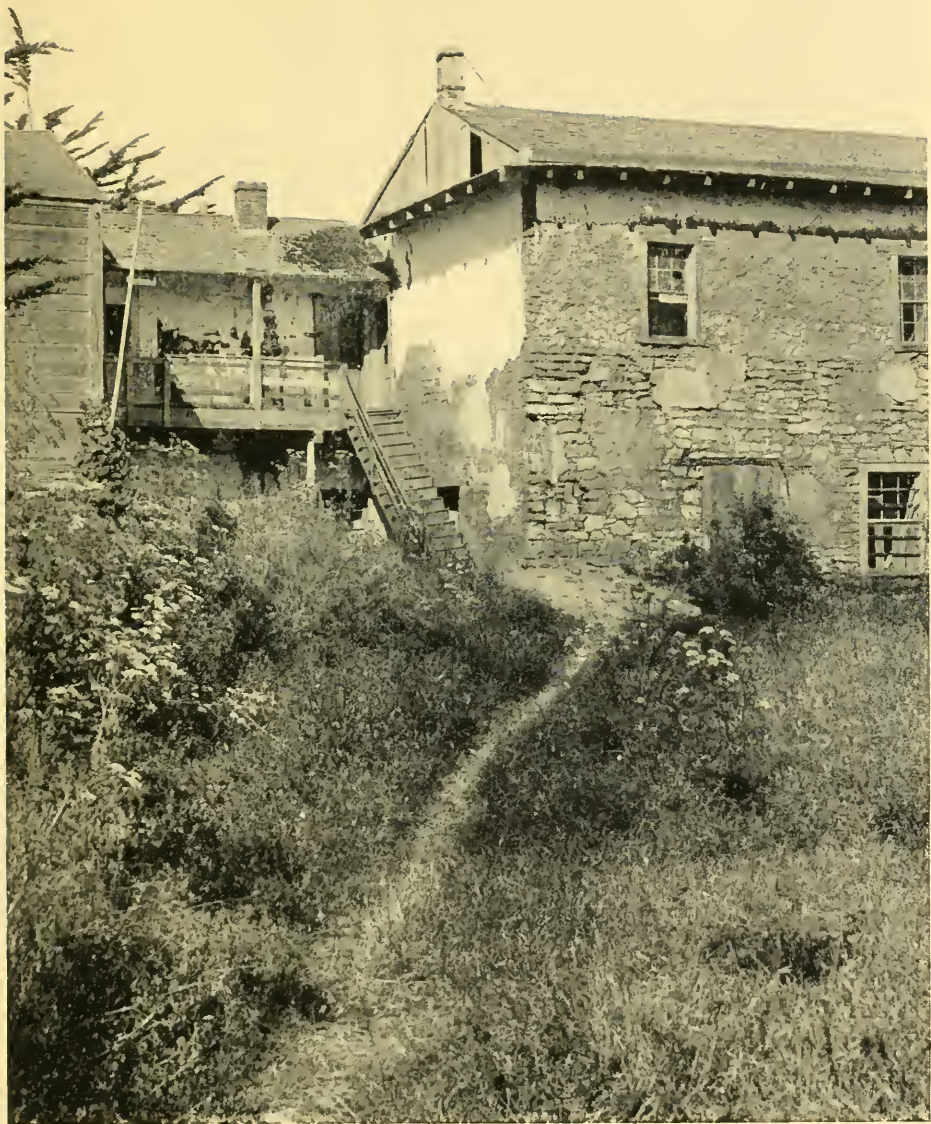
This is the graphic description which Stevenson gave of the little French restaurant which was held in high esteem by the Bohemians who sought Monterey in those early days, and no doubt if this description had not been interrupted we should have had a pen picture of this newly-found friend with whom Stevenson "played chess and discussed the universe," who was his angel of mercy during these most tragic months of his life when he lived 'twixt hope and despair, awaiting the freedom of the woman whom he loved, fighting ill health and poverty and at

that time doubtful of a literary fame which was as yet to be won.

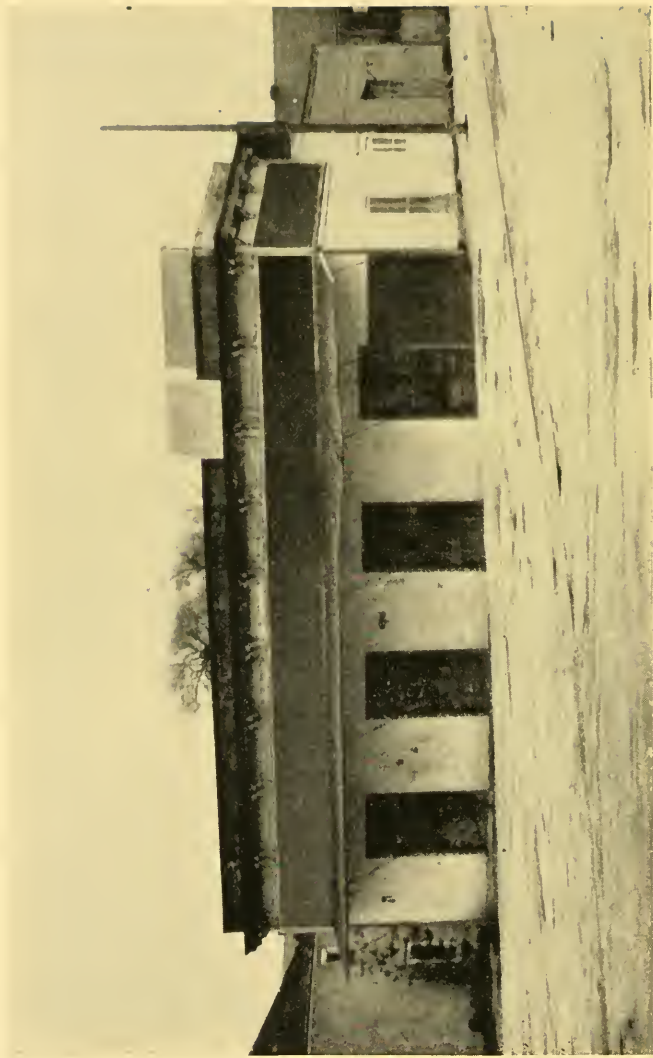
It was during these dark days that this friendship grew between Simoneau and Stevenson. We can imagine the depth and strength of this bond, the old man caring for the young fellow as he would have cared for his son, the young man confiding to him all the hopes and longings which tore his sensitive heart. No wonder that the memory of this friendship is hallowed, one whose lingering beams throw the brilliancy of a halo around Simoneau's latter days.

Simoneau never tires of receiving his friends, and he meets them with a warm hand-clasp. He tells you that most of his visitors are good company, "for people who read Stevenson are usually good company," and as he speaks of the past a tender smile plays over his aged features, a smile which proves a friendship the recollection of which brightens his uneventful life. It is with the greatest pride, and yet with a reserve which shows that his friend's personal letters are most sacred to him, that he hands you one to read,—a letter written from La Solitude, Hyers-les-Palmiers, Var,—a bright, cheerful letter in which Stevenson speaks of his happy married life "with a wife that suits me down to the ground."

This is only one of the numerous, strong and beautiful letters which Stevenson wrote him on his return to France, letters



*CORNER OF ADOBE SHOWING WINDOW
OF ROOM OCCUPIED BY STEVENSON*

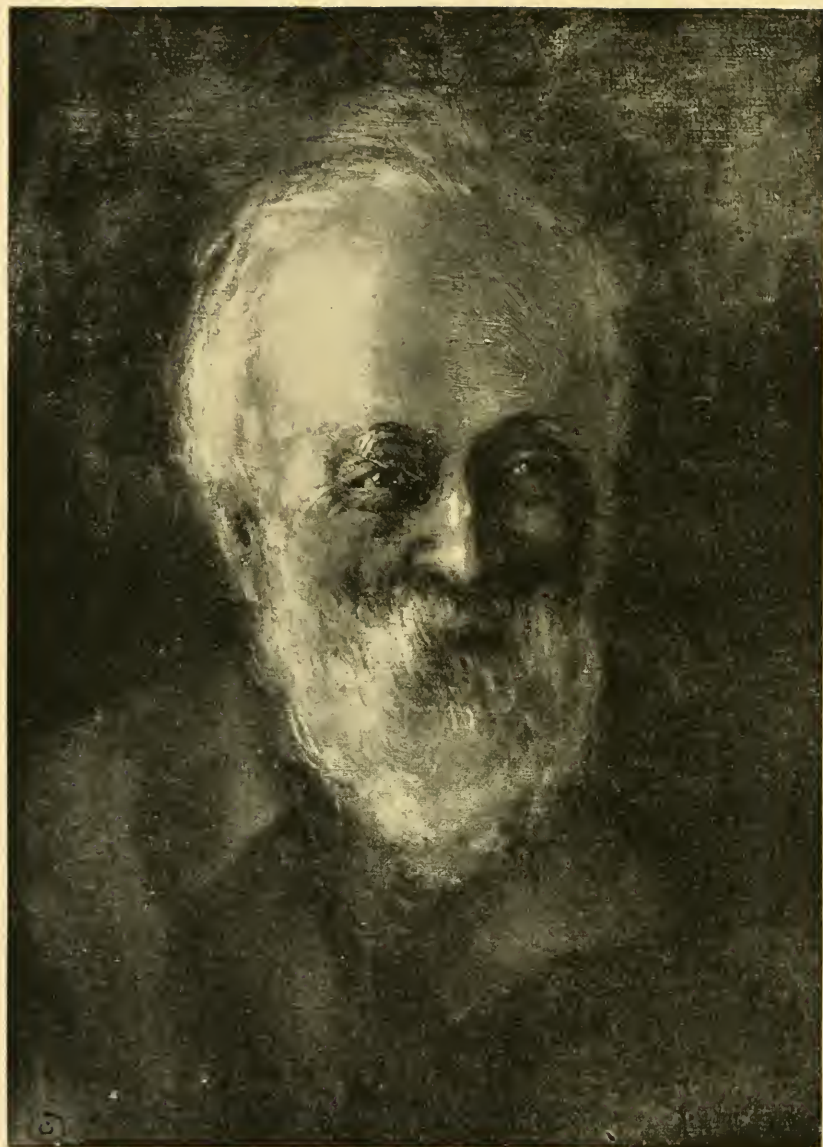


OLD RESTAURANT KEPT BY JULES SIMONEAU
IN THE EARLY DAYS

which are sacred to Simoneau, and he tells you they will never leave his hands. "Gold could not buy them," and we believe it to be true, such fine sentiment exists in him and has characterized his life.

He is a great philosopher, and it can well be imagined how Stevenson, during his convalescence, "discussed the universe" with him in the evenings. Happiness and contentment are his constant companions, and he says, "While some are preparing for a heaven somewhere in the tomorrow, I am making a heaven of today," and so he lives. Most tenderly does he bring out the treasured works of Stevenson, each volume a gift from the author and made priceless by some beautiful expression of gratitude written therein. In a volume of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" is written, "Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, but a stranger case would be if Robert Louis Stevenson should forget Jules Simoneau." In a volume of "Virginibus Puerisque" is written,—"*Que nous avons passe de bonnes soirees, mon brave Simoneau! Sois tranquille! Je ne les oublierai pas!*" ("How many good evenings have we passed together, my kind Simoneau! Rest assured, I shall never forget them.")

On the walls of his humble dwelling hangs a portrait of his illustrious friend—the gift of Mrs. Stevenson—while directly



JULES SIMONEAU AT THE AGE OF 86
Portrait Sketch by Josephine Blanch

underneath are the inspired words which embody the philosophy of Stevenson's life, which philosophy his humble friend so beautifully sets forth in his living,—

*“To be honest, to be kind, to earn a little,
to spend a little less,—to make, upon the
whole, a family happier by his presence.”*

Although the years have passed and Stevenson now sleeps “neath the wide and starry sky” and many changes have come to the little Spanish town, the old man lives on at the age of eighty-six, not in his little French restaurant as in the old days, but in his quaint cottage surrounded by an old-fashioned garden, a modest shrine where the worshiper of genius may spend an hour.

Josephine Mildred Blauvelt

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